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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2686  
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2310  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7165  
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6344  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1574  
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0525  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3378  
RHMFIS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000466

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2018  
TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM KPAO AG  
SUBJECT: MUSLIM PARTY TRIES NEW APPROACH TO DECRIMINALIZE  
DEFAMATION

REF: A. ALGIERS 291  
    1B. ALGIERS 388

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas F. Daughton;  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) SUMMARY: The Movement for a Society of Peace (MSP), the Muslim Brotherhood party that is one of the members of the ruling coalition in Algeria, proposed in parliament on April 22 to cancel a 2001 law that constitutes the basis for the criminalization of religious and journalistic speech. The effort, which would include the decriminalization of press defamation, is a resubmission of a bill the MSP introduced in 2004. At the time, the bill was not even put on the agenda for discussion in parliament. This time, according to our contacts within the MSP, the party chose to use the media to generate debate, and the initiative was featured prominently in the Arabic-language dailies El Bilad and El Fajr on April 23. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Ahmed Yessaad, head of MSP's parliamentary bloc, told us on April 23 that his party was resubmitting its 2004 request to cancel article 144 bis 1 and article 87 bis 10 of the 2001 Penal Code, which make journalists and imams eligible for criminal prosecution for their speech. According to Yessaad, MSP is seeking to remove all articles of the Penal Code that "undermine journalists' status" and make them vulnerable to criminal prosecution. Yessaad said the law would be submitted to the Office of the Speaker for examination before submission to the government. Parliamentary procedure gives the government 60 days to respond to MSP's request.

13. (C) What is new about this second attempt is that MSP has decided to try to use the media to bring political pressure to bear on the government in order to force genuine consideration of this law. Abdelkrim Dahmane, responsible for external affairs at the MSP, acknowledged this publicly, and Farouk Taifour, MSP's press attaché, confirmed to us on April 23 that the party was adopting a new strategy to use the media to break political deadlock, in advance of International Press Freedom Day on May 1.

14. (C) COMMENT: MSPs opposition to the rigorous 2001 Penal Code set by former Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia is well known. They view it as a tool used by the government to restrict and contain Islam to an excessive degree. Adding the cause of press freedom to their efforts, especially in a public way, is a welcome amplifier for our efforts to

decriminalize press defamation (refs A and B). Although it is certainly a positive development that this initiative comes from one of the three parties of the ruling coalition, we are skeptical that it will quickly gain political traction. The MSP will hold a much-anticipated party congress on April 29, during which an internal power struggle will likely take precedence over the effort to decriminalize defamation.

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